

People today could miss Him again

Father Albert Shamon
 Courier columnist

Sunday's Readings: (R3) John 1:6-8, 19-28; (R1) Isaiah 61:1-2, 10-11; (R2) 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24.

In last Sunday's Gospel we met John the Baptist, the great prophet of Advent. Perhaps the first impression of John may have been negative: his clothing, his eating habits, his message — all were a bit forbidding.

This Sunday, however, we read about the Baptist as presented in the Gospel according to St. John. He is the same prophet, but his sermon sounds different. Last Sunday the Baptist talked about "repentance and the remission of sins;" this Sunday he comes "for testimony, to testify to the light." This is a joyful announcement that the true light is on its way to enlighten a dismal world. Thus this Sunday used to be called "Gaudete Sunday" ("Joy Sunday.")

Yet his preaching draws controversy. Jews from Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask him, "Just who are you?" What are your credentials, pedigree, authority for causing a disruptive ruckus among the people?

Then these keepers of law and or-



A WORD FOR SUNDAY

der, the managers of the media, the people who are supposed to be "in the know," can't figure out who John is. "Are you Elijah?" — the one supposed to herald the Messiah? "I am not." "Are you the Prophet? — the one foretold by Moses?" "No." "Then who are you?" If they couldn't figure out who John was, a mere forerunner of Jesus, how in the world could they ever hope to know the one whose ad-

vent John was announcing?

And when the Jesus whom John had foretold came, they failed to see him. Why do you think they failed to see who John was, who Jesus was?

Perhaps they were looking for the wrong type of Messiah — a general on a warhorse, not a carpenter's son from Nazareth. Maybe people were a lot like us, they were just too busy, too preoccupied with this and that, too busy preparing for Christmas that they managed to miss Christmas when it finally came!

The Gospel is a warning to us. People missed Jesus before, they couldn't figure out even who John was, so we might do so again.

A student taking a course in Italian Renaissance art loved it, but it made him sad. I asked why it made him sad. He said, "I spent nearly a year in Italy and went to all the great art galleries there, saw all the great paintings, yet because I didn't know what to look for, I didn't see a thing."

If you want to see the stars on a clear December night, you must get out away from the lights of the city, go out into the countryside where it is very dark. Then you will be able to see the stars' fragile light. Maybe the light

that comes into our world in Jesus, that light to which John says he was sent to testify, is so fragile that we must get away from the humdrum, daily course of things, sit silently, pray, wait, in order for our eyes to be able to see.

Years ago, J.B. Phillips wrote a popular book, *Your God Is Too Small*. Perhaps our God is too small, too understood, too flattened, too much reduced to our size. If we understand God too well, perhaps that is testimonial that we do not understand God. Maybe the only way to see the Christ's fragile light dawning among us this Christmas, nearly two thousand years after its first dawn, is to admit that we are so blinded by other lights that we can't see his light.

John's message is both a joyous announcement and a solemn warning. The announcement is "Rejoice! God is coming among us." The warning is: "His coming among us as a babe can be so fragile, so wondrous and so delicate, so strange and so ordinary that we might miss it."

So our Advent prayer is "God, give us eyes to see your light when it dawns among us." Or, like the blind man at Jericho, "Lord, that I may see."

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